

Finance, Planning & Economic Development Policy and Scrutiny Committee

Date:	29 June 2023
Classification:	General Release
Title:	Participatory Budgeting Proposal
Report of:	Serena Simon, Director of Communities, Jake Bacchus, Director of Finance
Cabinet Member Portfolio	Cllr Boothroyd, Cllr Butler-Thalassis, Cllr Sanquest (formerly in the portfolio of Cllr Less) www.westminster.gov.uk/cabinet)
Wards Involved:	All
Policy Context:	Fairer Communities, Fairer Council
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1. Executive Summary

- The participatory budgeting approach forms a key part of the council's Fairer Westminster commitment to meaningfully engage residents more in decision making. The aims of this are to enable residents and communities to play an active role in defining what matters most to them, and having a voice in how money can be allocated against this. If residents are part of the decision-making, then the services which are commissioned will be more likely shaped to meet residents' needs.

Participatory budgeting has been developed over the past two years through the Community Priorities Programme, a grant making programme where residents are supported to decide the priorities, assess bids and make the decisions about which projects are funded.

This paper looks at how we can build on that experience and move over the next three years to more hyper local projects and a combination of area-based community assemblies and ward panel pilots. The proposal includes extending and developing the capacity of the community to do participatory

budgeting, and learning from different methods of implementing it what works best in terms of outcomes for the community and models of delivery.

The Community Priorities Programme forms part of an increased programme of grants for organisations and grassroots projects being offered throughout Westminster. There are plans to streamline and simplify for additional community benefit.

Key questions for consideration are:

- Clarifying the next steps for participatory budgeting, including a transitional approach to the development of capacity
- The stages for moving towards an area level approach, through creation of community assemblies across Westminster
- Defining distinct application and decision approaches for Participatory Budgeting for the smaller and larger community organisations, and for hyper-local projects and area or city-wide projects
- Establishing a two-year community involvement and funding cycle for the Community Priorities Programme, enabling participation in priority setting every two years and two-year funding agreements

2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

- Does the move to develop participatory budgeting capacity make sense?
- What do we want residents to experience through taking part in these decisions?
- How can we ensure the VCS is supported and engaged through this process?
- What are the barriers to participation in participatory budgeting?

3. Background

3.1 Overview

The Community Priorities Programme uses a participatory budgeting approach to define priorities and fund local projects in areas effected by deprivation. £300k is committed to this programme on annual basis from the Public Health Department, and £300k from the Communities Department. It is open to Westminster-based individuals and organisations.

Its funding criteria is based on qualitative community research undertaken in 2021 for the first round, and further engagement with 200 residents in the south as part of the programme expansion in 2022. Projects are shortlisted with residents and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) representatives and final allocation is decided at delegated authority level.

The programme funded 26 projects in round 1 and has now funded 51 projects in round 2. An evaluation report of the first round is due in July 2023.

In the development of the programme, we have learned from approaches used in other councils, including Newham, Brent and Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

3.2 Lessons to date

- The programme is based on a community development approach, which embeds training and support at every stage so that the people participating have the skills and confidence to engage fully with the process;
- Feedback from community organisations who have been through the application process has recommended different application and decision-making processes for the very small projects and organisations and for the established VCS organisations who are able to run projects across multiple wards;
- Training to support community panels in assessment process and training to make the decision is vital;
- Managing risk through compliance processes needs to be done before bids are sent to panels or assemblies to make a decision;
- There are many residents and community organisations who value being engaged in this process and want to contribute to their community in this way;
- Partnership opportunities and peer learning were welcomed by community providers in previous rounds of the CPP.
- One year project funding leads to starting and stopping projects too quickly, so we are moving to funding projects for two years;
- Running priority setting processes every year is costly in time for all involved, so we are moving to a two year cycle of priority setting.

General plan 2023 – 2026

	Capacity building	Decision making	Project grants	Development and engagement
2023-2024	<p>Recruit and train residents and community organisation for community assemblies and decision panels. (NB community assemblies in this context refer to the coming together of residents and agencies for a common purpose: to identify the most important needs and aspirations of the local community)</p> <p>Support community organisations with thinking through their projects and bid writing</p>	<p>Run 3 community assemblies to determine community priorities</p> <p>Run a combination of community assemblies and community panels to decide on the grants, including residents, VCS organisations and ward councillors in the processes</p>	<p>Define guidelines and application process and decision making for small community organisations, individuals, and hyper-local projects</p> <p>Define guidelines and application processes and decision making for established VCS organisations</p> <p>Run a CPP grants programme for 2 years of funding for projects</p>	<p>Engagement with residents, community organisations, ward councillors to ensure broad and diverse representation in the assemblies and panels. Leverage existing networks through resident associations and Neighbourhood Forums to achieve this.</p> <p>Engagement with community organisations to support the development of both hyper-local and area and city-wide projects.</p> <p>Extend the Register of Active Residents to maintain a database of all residents with interest and training in this area</p>

2024-2026	Build capacity in residents to engage in monitoring and evaluation	Run Community Assemblies in 2025-2026 to review priorities Run decision panels/assemblies for further project decision	Award project grants for 2 years Monitor and evaluate projects Annual impact reports	Discuss with ward councillors the opportunities for ward level pilots for ward panels
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Key timelines:

- **August – September 2023**
Plan and recruit for local community assemblies for priority setting.
- **October – November 2023**
Deliver community assemblies. Set up local community working groups/panels for next stages.
- **December 2023 – January 2024**
Begin application process, including capacity support and engagement with community groups and organisations.
- **January – February 2024**
Conduct community-led decision-making process (combination of panels and voting assemblies as outlined above)
- **March 2024**
Finalise community decision making and award grants for 2-year funding.
- **April 2024 – March 2025**
Project delivery, monitoring, support and learning.
- **April 2025**
Begin new phase of community priority setting with renewed approach based on learnings and scoping of opportunities for ward level pilots.

Learnings from Community Priorities Programme evaluation of pilot round (2021-2022)

The evaluation commissioned for this programme focussed on the public health and social wellbeing impacts that were delivered as a result of the community projects funded. This is currently in draft and not yet published. A bullet point overview of the key recommendations in the paper can be found below:

- Continue funding place-based projects with expansion to reach other wards.
- Increase networking opportunities to build partnerships between project providers.

- Create more shared learning opportunities for residents involved in participation.
- Continue to invest in a community development approach.
- Continue to embed co-production in the evaluation strategy for future rounds.
- Develop support for marketing and promotion of community projects once funded.

Learnings from Newham Council:

The current plan laid out for participatory budgeting is built on the previous rounds of Westminster’s Community Priorities Programme and also is informed by the approach of Newham’s Community Assembly Programme. In Newham, each neighbourhood/geographic area in the borough is allocated an amount of funding to spend on improving the area. Residents and community groups are invited to develop project plans to meet the priority needs they have identified in their area. Citizens set the priorities through assemblies and in the first cycle, used resident working groups to decide on projects that have been put forward for funding by the public. In the second cycle they have opted to use a combination of digital and in person voting. A key learning taken and embedded in the above programme outline is Newham’s move from a one-year to a two-year programme, emphasising that the first year should focus on deliberation, project application and participatory budgeting then the second year should focus on project delivery and evaluation.

Key outcomes of the proposed approach:

- Enable residents and communities to define what matters most to them and how funding should be allocated against this.
- Develop community-led solutions that deliver on priorities decided by residents.
- Invest directly in projects that realise positive impact for local communities.

If you have any queries about this Report or wish to inspect any of the Background Papers, please contact Christine Mead at cmead@westminster.gov.uk